Pandemic Intensifies Divisions Among US Elite

On Thursday April 30th, protesters, some carrying firearms, marched into the Michigan state capitol building. The demonstration was just the latest of a stream of protests demanding an end to the lockdown and social distancing.

Despite giving daily briefings to the country amidst the pandemic, and urging social distancing, US President Donald Trump has tweeted in support of these protests, which are taking place across the country. Trump has also singled out Michigan’s democratic governor for criticism. It seems there is a widespread mobilization opposing necessary health measures throughout the United States.

It is unclear what the protesters want. Some echo the sentiments of Glenn Beck and Texas Lt. Governor, Dan Patrick, that the lives of elderly and vulnerable people should be sacrificed for the sake of revving up America’s economy. Others echo claims circulating on social media, alleging that the pandemic is a hoax conducted by enemies of Donald Trump. Signs follow the ideological brand of the 2008-2010 Tea Party protests that opposed Obama’s healthcare plan. Slogans include “Social Distancing is Communism” and there are placards containing references to Hitler, the US Constitution, Liberty, and Tyranny.

Meanwhile, there are also mobilizations of the organized political left. Examples of these include: car caravans calling for a rent freeze, strikes and organizing among essential workers. Unrest is brewing in US society as the economy is the worst it has been in decades. Unemployment numbers have reached level not seen since the Great Depression. The chasm between two factions in the US economic ruling class, divisions which expanded under Obama and became even more intense following the 2016 elections, are sharper than ever.

Who is Behind The Anti-Lock Down Protests?

The people responsible for the right wing mobilizations are a coalition of millionaires and billionaires who feel like they are locked out by the ultra-rich. This is the coalition that took Trump to the White House in 2016. Amidst the pandemic, these lower levels of American capital are watching the blood gush from their financial wounds.

With oil prices lower than they have ever been, an essential part of the Trump coalition, fracking companies, have begun to face the possibility of their ultimate demise. Frackers were already extracting oil and natural gas from American shale on credit from banks, with low oil prices hurting their profit margins. The New York Times published an op-ed by Bethany McLean with the headline: “Coronavirus May Kill Our Fracking Fever Dream" predicting that the pandemic will finish them off for good.

Meanwhile, the other big names among the Trump camp are also suffering. AmWay, the multi-level marketing scheme that enriched Trump’s billionaire Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has watched its sales plummet. Hobby Lobby, whose CEO, David Green, was one of Trump’s most outspoken supporters, closed all of its stores until further notice on April 7th. NASCAR is hoping to resume its season in late May, but its CEO, Jim France, son of outspoken Trump supporter, Brian France, has undoubtedly lost significant amounts of money from the cancelled races and lost advertisement revenue. While Home Depot, owned by Trump supporter, Bernie Marcus, has managed to stay open as an essential business, it has been forced to accept limited hours, and sales have significantly decreased in the spring months that usually generate about 30% of annual sales.

The desperation to end the lockdown on the part of many millionaire and billionaire capitalists is quite real. They face financial ruin. Meanwhile, they are very well aware that certain competitors are fortified enough to ride out the
Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos is an outspoken opponent of Donald Trump. He owns the Washington Post, a publication that has been harshly critical of the administration. While the lockdown has been bad for most US businesses, on April 14th, Amazon’s stock reached its all-time high. Amazon is hiring new employees to deliver products, and Bezos has made billions.

The big four super-major oil companies that dominate the New York Stock exchange and function like a mini-cartel, are happily watching their competitors in fracking and drilling suffer amidst the oil price drops. With the elimination of frackers, Exxon-Mobile, BP, Chevron, and Shell Oil would walk out of the lockdown with an even more well established monopoly than before.

Social media giants are certainly not suffering as Americans sit at home, updating their status, tweeting, posting pictures and watching ads. These types of corporations that already function as a natural monopoly are quite happy to see a large percentage of the US population working from home.

Many of the conspiracy theories that claim the pandemic is a hoax focus on Bill Gates, the billionaire founder of Microsoft. Bill Gates is an outspoken Malthusian who believes the human population must be decreased. In the conspiracy theories, Bill Gates has become a stand in poster boy for a faction of the US ruling class long-labelled “The Eastern Establishment.” The Rockefeller Family, whose Standard Oil is now reincarnated as Exxon-Mobile, the Morgans, the Duponts, the Mellons, and the “old money” elite that has been the most powerful faction in US politics for generations, represents a more managerial wing of the American elite. These are the elements that worked with Cecil Rhodes’ Round Table Group, and eventually gave birth to the Council on Foreign Relations. Rockefeller money worked to create the Trilateral Commission, Planned Parenthood, the Asia Society, and many of the other institutions that have crafted US government policy in a long-term and strategic way.

These forces favor stability and long-term hegemony over their own short-term economic growth. They are closer to the Intelligence Agencies than the military, and friendlier to Silicon Valley than to retail owners and industrialists. The ideological right-wing has long targeted this wing of American politics, from the 1950s when the John Birch Society accused the Rockefellers of being Communists, up to the rants of Alex Jones denouncing Goldman Sachs and calling for “real capitalism.” These forces have entrenched themselves well enough, and built up enough of a monopolistic position, that the pandemic will not put them out of business. Rather, the pandemic is a convenient way to clear out their competitors and secure their position. As the lower levels of capital bleed, they call out their powerful nemesis with rage, realizing that while they have much to lose, the Eastern Establishment is likely to emerge even more powerful and dominant.

Leftist film-maker Michael Moore produced and released a new film called “Planet of the Humans” arguing that economic growth is bad, and that overpopulation is the main the problem causing climate change.

Alarm bells are ringing among the circles of power who can see that social unrest is pretty much inevitable. The national suicide hotline reported a 338% increase in call volume during March. Opioid deaths have also risen.

The Trump faction, that was already hostile to China, is looking to point the finger of blame at Beijing. Liberal voices also condemn China but in a somewhat softer tone.

The divisions among the American ruling class have become thicker than ever, and the scramble for profits is likely to intensify. A burning question for the American elite is how intense will the climate be in the lead up to the Presidential vote in November and how the results will be affected.

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